



Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

## Kids are using phones in class, even when it's against the rules. Should schools ban them all day?

By JOCELYN GECKER

**SAN FRANCISCO (AP)** — In California, a high school teacher complains that students watch Netflix on their phones during class. In Maryland, a chemistry teacher says students use gambling apps to place bets during the school day. Around the country, educators say students routinely send Snapchat messages in class, listen to music and shop online, among countless other examples of how smartphones distract from teaching and learning. The hold that phones have on adolescents in America today is well-documented, but teachers say parents are often not aware to what extent students use them inside the classroom. And increasingly, educators and experts are speaking with one voice on the question of how to handle it: Ban phones during class-

es. "Students used to have an understanding that you aren't supposed to be on your phone in class. Those days are gone," said James Granger, who requires students in his science classes at a Los Angeles-area high school to place their phones in "a cellphone cubby" with numbered slots. "The only solution that works is to physically remove the cellphone from the student." Most schools already have rules regulating student phone use, but they are enforced sporadically. A growing number of leaders at the state and federal levels have begun endorsing school cellphone bans and suggesting new ways to curb access to the devices. The latest state intervention came in Utah, where Gov. Spencer Cox, a Re-



A sign is shown over a phone holder in a classroom at Delta High School, Friday, Feb. 23, 2024, in Delta, Utah.

Associated Press

publican, last month urged all school districts and the state Board of Education to remove cellphones from

classrooms. He cited studies that show learning improves, distractions are decreased and students are

more likely to talk to each other if phones are taken away.

Continued on next page

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**Continued from Front**

"We just need a space for six or seven hours a day where kids are not tethered to these devices," Cox told reporters this month. He said his initiative, which is not binding, is part of a legislative push to protect kids in Utah from the harms of social media.

Last year, Florida became the first state to crack down on phones in school. A law that took effect in July requires all Florida public schools to ban student cellphone use during class time and block access to social media on district Wi-Fi. Some districts, including Orange County Public Schools, went further and banned phones the entire school day.

Oklahoma, Vermont and Kansas have also recently introduced what is becoming known as "phone-free schools" legislation.

And two U.S. senators — Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican, and Tim Kaine, a Virginia Democrat — introduced legislation in December that would require a federal study on the effects of cellphone use in schools on students' mental health and academic performance. Theirs is one of several bipartisan alliances calling for stiffer rules for social media companies and greater online safety for kids.

Nationally, 77% of U.S. schools say they prohibit cellphones at school for non-academic use, according to the National Center for Education Statis-



**A phone holder hangs in a classroom at Delta High School, Friday, Feb. 23, 2024, in Delta, Utah. Associated Press**

tics. But that number is misleading. It does not mean students are following those bans or all those schools are enforcing them. Just ask teachers.

"Cellphone use is out of control. By that, I mean that I cannot control it, even in my own classroom," said Patrick Truman, who teaches at a Maryland high school that forbids student use of cellphones during class. It is up to each teacher to enforce the policy, so Truman bought a 36-slot caddy for storing student phones. Still, every day, students hide phones in their laps or under books as they play video games and check social media.

Tired of being the phone police, he has come to a reluctant conclusion: "Students who are on their

phones are at least quiet. They are not a behavior issue."

A study last year from Common Sense Media found that 97% of kids use their phones during school hours, and that kids say school cellphone policies vary — often from one classroom to another — and aren't always enforced.

For a school cellphone ban to work, educators and experts say the school administration must be the one to enforce it and not leave that task to teachers. The Phone-Free Schools Movement, an advocacy group formed last year by concerned mothers, says policies that allow students to keep phones in their backpacks, as many schools do, are ineffective.

"If the bookbag is on the

floor next to them, it's buzzing and distracting, and they have the temptation to want to check it," said Kim Whitman, a co-founder of the group, which advises schools to require phones be turned off and locked away all day.

Some students say such policies take away their autonomy and cut off their main mode of communication with family and friends. Pushback also has come from parents who fear being cut off from their kids if there is a school emergency. Whitman advises schools to make exceptions for students with special educational and medical needs, and to inform parents on expert guidance that phones can be a dangerous distraction for students during an

emergency. Jaden Willoughey, 14, shares the concern about being out of contact with his parents if there's a crisis. But he also sees the upsides of turning in his phone at school.

At Delta High School in rural Utah, where Jaden is a freshman, students are required to check their phones at the door when entering every class. Each of the school's 30 or so classrooms has a cellphone storage unit that looks like an over-the-door shoe bag with three dozen smartphone-sized slots.

"It helps you focus on your work, and it's easier to pay attention in class," Jaden said. A classmate, Mackenzie Stanworth, 14, said it would be hard to ignore her phone if it was within reach. It's a relief, she said, to "take a break from the screen and the social life on your phone and actually talk to people in person." It took a few years to tweak the cellphone policy and find a system that worked, said Jared Christensen, the school's vice principal.

"At first it was a battle. But it has been so worth it," he said. "Students are more attentive and engaged during class time. Teachers are able to teach without competing with cellphones. And student learning has increased," he said, citing test scores that are at or above state averages for the first time in years. "I can't definitively say it's because of this policy. But I know it's helping." □

# U.S. Army is slashing thousands of posts in major revamp to prepare for future wars

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The U.S. Army is slashing the size of its force by about 24,000, or almost 5%, and restructuring to be better able to fight the next major war, as the service struggles with recruiting shortfalls that made it impossible to bring in enough soldiers to fill all the jobs.

The cuts will mainly be in already-empty posts not actual soldiers including in jobs related to counterinsurgency that swelled during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars but are not needed as much today. About 3,000 of the cuts would come from Army special operations forces.

At the same time, however, the plan will add about 7,500 troops in other critical missions, including air-defense and counter-drone units and five new task forces around the world with enhanced cyber, intelligence and long-range strike capabilities.

Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said she and Gen. Randy George, the Army chief, worked to thin out the number of places where they had empty or excess slots.

"We're moving away from counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. We want to be postured for large-scale combat operations," Wormuth told reporters on Tuesday. "So we looked at where were there pieces of force structure that were probably more associated with counterinsurgency, for example, that we don't need anymore."

George added that Army leaders did a lot of analysis to choose the places to cut.

"The things that we want to not have in our formation are actually things that we don't think are going to make us successful on the battlefield going forward," he said.

According to an Army document, the service is "significantly overstructured" and there aren't enough soldiers to fill existing units. The



Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth speaks at the Pentagon in Washington, Feb. 22, 2024. Associated Press

cuts, it said, are "spaces" not "faces" and the Army will not be asking soldiers to leave the force.

Instead, the decision reflects the reality that for years the Army hasn't been able to fill thousands of empty posts. While the Army as it's currently structured can have up to 494,000 soldiers, the total number of active-duty soldiers right now is about 445,000.

Under the new plan, the goal is to bring in enough troops over the next five years to reach a level of 470,000.

The planned overhaul comes after two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan that forced the Army to quickly and dramatically expand in order to fill the brigades sent to the battlefield. That included a massive counterinsurgency mission to battle al-Qaida, the Taliban and the Islamic State group.

Over time the military's focus has shifted to great power competition from adversaries such as China and Russia, and threats from Iran and North Korea. And the war in Ukraine has shown the need for greater emphasis on air-defense systems and high-tech abilities both to use and counter airborne and sea-based drones.

Army leaders said they looked carefully across the board at all the service's

job specialties in search of places to trim. And they examined the ongoing effort to modernize the Army,

with new high-tech weapons, to determine where additional forces should be focused.

According to the plan, the Army will cut about 10,000 spaces for engineers and similar jobs that were tied to counterinsurgency missions. An additional 2,700 cuts will come from units that don't deploy often and can be trimmed, and 6,500 will come from various training and other posts.

There also will be about 10,000 posts cut from cavalry squadrons, Stryker brigade combat teams, infantry brigade combat teams and security force assistance brigades, which are used to train foreign forces. □

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# Notable numbers capture the wild weather hitting much of the U.S. this week

**CHICAGO (AP)** — Wild fluctuations in temperatures are being recorded in much of the United States this week, with some cities experiencing a winter weather whiplash in which they are going from record highs to severe storms to snow and freezing temperatures in a matter of days. And the whiplash does not end there. The dramatic arctic plunge in many locations will be short-lived, according to the National Weather Service. Temperatures will be back above average by the end of the week.

Here's a look at notable numbers from the recent weather:

78

The number of cities that hit record-high temperatures Monday from International Falls, Minnesota, to the Texas-Mexico border, according to the National Weather Service.

6

Weather service observation sites across the country that had their warmest February day on record Monday.

-9

The anticipated low Wednesday (22 below Celsius) in International Falls, Minnesota, which hit a record high of 53 (11 Celsius)



A person walks along the shore of Lake Michigan Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2024, in Chicago.

Associated Press

on Monday. That tied the previous record set in 1958. The forecast calls for 7 to 11 inches (17 to 28 centimeters) of snow by the end of Tuesday before temperatures slide.

0

That's how many of Wisconsin's 25,000 miles (40,200 kilometers) of snowmobile trails were open Tuesday. Some trails were open for a little over a week in January after a heavy snowfall, but most trails across the

state have been closed all season. The lack of snow in northern Wisconsin has hit businesses hard. In Vilas County, home to Eagle River, the self-proclaimed "Snowmobile Capital of the World," restaurants and others that rely on tourism money are down as much as 50% in business compared with last year, said Collette Sorgel, the county's tourism and publicity director. "This is definitely not a February we have

ever lived through," Sorgel said.

250

Miles (402 kilometers) of Maine's Can-Am Crown International Sled Dog Races' main event, which had to be canceled because of a lack of snow, showing it's not just the nation's mid-section being hit with high temperatures.

50

The expected high temperature (10 Celsius) in Chicago at 12:01 a.m. Wednesday,

after the record was broken Monday and was near record Tuesday. The temperatures will drop into the low 20s (several degrees below zero Celsius) on Wednesday.

98

The high temperature (36 Celsius) recorded Monday in Laredo, Texas, which was the hottest spot in the country. The old record of 96 (35 Celsius) was set in 1986. Dallas hit 94 (34 Celsius), which broke the old record of 90 (32 Celsius) set in 1917. The average first 90-degree day in Dallas occurs April 19.

45

The number of years Tom Skilling, the iconic WGN-TV meteorologist, has been at the Chicago TV station. His last day on air is Wednesday, leading his fans to speculate that Mother Nature is giving him a sendoff. He's been a TV meteorologist even longer, having worked at WITI-TV in Milwaukee before moving to WGN.

19

More specifically, March 19, the spring, or vernal, equinox — also known as the first day of spring. During the equinox, the Earth's axis and its orbit line up so that both hemispheres get equal sunlight. □

## Letter containing white powder sent to Donald Trump Jr.'s home

By **JILL COLVIN** and **DAVID FISCHER**

Associated Press

**MIAMI (AP)** — Emergency

crews responded Monday after a letter containing an unidentified white powder was sent to the Florida

home of Donald Trump Jr., the eldest son of former President and GOP front-runner Donald Trump.

A person familiar with the matter said that results on the substance were inconclusive, but officials do not believe it was deadly. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to confirm details of the letter, which were first reported by The Daily Beast.

Trump Jr. opened the letter, which also contained a death threat, in his home office, and emergency responders wearing hazmat suits responded.

Jupiter police said the investigation is being handled by the Palm Beach

Sheriff's Office, which said it was working with the U.S. Secret Service but didn't have any further details. The Secret Service declined to comment.

Trump Jr. is one of his father's top campaign surrogates, frequently headlining events and appearing in interviews on his behalf. It's the second time white powder has been sent to the former president's oldest son. In 2018, his then-wife, Vanessa, was taken to a New York City hospital after she opened an envelope addressed to her husband that contained an unidentified white powder. Police later said the substance wasn't dangerous.

In March 2016, police detectives and FBI agents investigated a threatening letter sent to the Manhattan apartment of Donald Trump Jr.'s brother Eric that also contained a white powder that turned out to be harmless.

Envelopes containing white powder were also sent twice in 2016 to Trump Tower, which served as Trump's campaign headquarters. Hoax attacks using white powder play on fears that date to 2001, when letters containing deadly anthrax were mailed to news organizations and the offices of two U.S. senators. Those letters killed five people. □



Donald Trump Jr., speaks at a rally for his father, Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump, in Laconia, N.H., Jan. 22, 2024.

Associated Press

## Dutch court convicts 17 members of criminal gang and sentences 3 to life imprisonment

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

**AMSTERDAM (AP)** — A Dutch court convicted 17 suspects on Tuesday in the long-running trial of an underworld gang that planned a string of killings. Judges handed life sentences to three of them, including the gang's "undisputed leader," Ridouan Taghi, once the Netherlands most-wanted fugitive.

The trial and three more murders linked to the case have enthralled and rattled the Netherlands, exposing the deadly reality of the country's drug-fueled criminal underworld.

Taghi and several co-defendants did not attend the final day of their trial at a tightly guarded courthouse on the outskirts of the Dutch capital. Heavily armed police officers wearing body armor, helmets and ski masks patrolled streets around the court as cars carrying some of the defendants swept into an underground parking lot for the hearing.

The court convicted Taghi in five murders and called him the "undisputed lead-



A vehicle carrying suspects arrives at the high security court in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2024, where judges are to rule in the Marengo case, one of the largest trials in Dutch history with seventeen defendants accused of participation in a criminal organization and of involvement in 6 murders and 4 attempted murders.

Associated Press

er" of a "murder organization."

"He decided who would be killed and spared no one," the presiding judge said. "The amount of suffering Taghi caused to the victims and their loved ones is barely imaginable."

The court ruled that Taghi

also used extreme violence to intimidate enemies and potential police informants. "By doing so he prevented people from cooperating with the police. Such terror has a disruptive effect on society," the presiding judge said. Court officials asked media not to identify

the judges by name over security concerns.

The brother of a key witness, identified only as Nabil B., his lawyer and a journalist who acted as a confidante for the witness were all killed in the nearly six years since the trial opened.

Lawyer Derk Wiersum was

gunned down outside his home in Amsterdam on Sept. 18, 2019. Two men have been convicted of murder in his killing.

Journalist Peter R. de Vries was also shot in Amsterdam as he walked to his car from a television studio on July 6, 2021. He died nine days later of his injuries. Prosecutors have sought life sentences for three of the suspects in his slaying.

Those murders gave the already grim trial "a pitch-black edge," the presiding judge told a packed courtroom.

The judge lamented that De Vries "will never again sit in the press bench" at the court.

Dutch King Willem-Alexander called De Vries' shooting "an attack on journalism, the cornerstone of our constitutional state and therefore also an attack on the rule of law."

Taghi was one of the Netherlands' most-wanted men until he was arrested in Dubai in 2019 and flown home to face trial. He and other defendants were charged with involvement in six murders and four attempted murders. □

## Newborns in Japan are at a new low, while fewer couples marry

By MARI YAMAGUCHI

Associated Press

**TOKYO (AP)** — The number of babies born in Japan last year fell for an eighth straight year to a new low, government data showed Tuesday, and a top official said it was critical for the country to reverse the trend in the coming half-dozen years.

The 758,631 babies born in Japan in 2023 were a 5.1% decline from the previous year, according to the Health and Welfare Ministry. It was the lowest number of births since Japan started compiling the statistics in 1899.

The number of marriages fell by 5.9% to 489,281 couples, falling below a half-

million for the first time in 90 years one of the key reasons for the declining births. Out-of-wedlock births are rare in Japan because of family values based on a paternalistic tradition.

Surveys show that many younger Japanese balk at marrying or having families, discouraged by bleak job prospects, the high cost of living that rises at a faster pace than salaries and corporate cultures that are not compatible with having both parents work. Crying babies and children playing outside are increasingly considered a nuisance, and many young parents say they often feel isolated. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi told

reporters Tuesday that the ongoing declining birth rate is at "critical state."

"The period over the next six years or so until 2030s, when the younger population will start declining rapidly, will be the last chance we may be able to reverse the trend," he said. "There is no time to waste."

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has called the low births "the biggest crisis Japan faces," and put forward a package of measures that have included more support and subsidies mostly for childbirth, children and their families.

But experts say they doubt whether the government's efforts will be effective because so far they have



A pedestrian crossing a street with a child is seen through a taxi window in Tokyo, Monday, July 19, 2021.

Associated Press

largely focused on people who already are married or already are planning to have children, while not adequately addressing a growing population of young people who are reluctant to go that far. The number of births has been falling since 50 years ago, when it peaked at about 2.1 million. The de-

cline to an annual number below 760,000 has happened faster than earlier projections predicting that would happen by 2035.

Japan's population of more than 125 million is projected to fall by about 30% to 87 million by 2070, with four out of every 10 people at age 65 or older. □

## A retired teacher and marine biologist fighting the government win an appeal to protect Barbuda land

By DÁNICA COTO

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP)

— A top court in London ruled Tuesday that two residents of the tiny Caribbean island of Barbuda have the right to challenge construction of an airstrip that critics say endangers fragile ecosystems and was begun without any permits.

The ruling by the Privy Council is considered a big win for John Mussington, a marine biologist, and Jacklyn Frank, a retired teacher, who launched a legal fight against the government of the twin-island nation of Antigua and Barbuda in July 2018.

“The fact that this ruling comes almost seven years after John first discovered the bulldozing of the forest is no coincidence,” said Sarah O’Malley, an attorney with the U.K.-based nonprofit Global Legal Action Network, which helped attorneys representing the Barbudians. “Environmental activists around the globe are often bogged down with procedural impediments making litigation costly and time-consuming, a subterfuge employed by those destroying the environment for their own profit.”

However, O’Malley said the decision would make it easier for “all who seek to protect nature” to legally challenge government ac-



Hotel clubs and homes stand on Princess Diana beach in Barbuda, Antigua and Barbuda, Oct. 23, 2023, six years after Hurricane Irma slammed into the tiny Caribbean island as a powerful Category 5 storm.

tions.

The government of Antigua and Barbuda had argued that Mussington and Frank were “busybodies” who had no standing to mount a legal fight.

Mussington said the ruling would have “significant implications for citizens of Antigua and Barbuda who have long been suffering from the lack of transparency and accountability from key institutions and officials charged with implementing the planning laws.”

The ruling also is expected to set a precedent for other Caribbean nations fighting to protect land that wealthy foreign investors seek to develop, especially when investors seize upon

economic opportunities following a catastrophe or national disaster.

A spokesperson for the office of Prime Minister Gaston Browne and a representative for the development did not respond to messages seeking comment about the decision. The ruling by the Privy Council allows the two Barbudians to challenge an April 2021 decision by the Court of Appeal of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court that found the residents were not allowed to take legal action against the government.

While Antigua and Barbuda obtained its independence from the U.K. in 1981, it remains under a constitutional monarchy with King

Charles as its head of state and the Privy Council as its final court of appeal.

One Privy Council judge, David Hope, argued that environmental issues can be raised by someone even if they are not personally affected by a certain action. He gave an example of construction of wind turbines on a route used by an osprey.

“The osprey has no means of taking that step on its own behalf, any more than any other wild creature. If its interests are to be protected, someone has to be allowed to speak on its behalf,” he wrote.

The ongoing airport construction on Barbuda is part of a deal involving the

Associated Press

government, the Barbuda Council and PLH (Barbuda) Ltd., established by U.S. billionaire John Paul DeJoria, co-founder of the Paul Mitchell hair products company. Also involved is U.S.-based Discovery Land Co., founded by Michael Meldman of Casamigos Tequila. The companies plan to build 495 upscale homes, an 18-hole golf course, a beach club and a natural gas storage facility on more than 600 acres (240 hectares) of protected wetland.

The developers began work on the airstrip around September 2017, after the government evacuated the entire island of Barbuda following Hurricane Irma, a Category 5 storm that was the strongest hurricane ever observed in the open Atlantic.

Construction began without an environmental impact assessment or a license from the Barbuda Council to clear forest, according to Global Legal Action Network. In addition, there were no public meetings notifying anyone of the construction, and an application for a development permit wasn’t submitted until after construction began. About 400 acres (160 hectares) that is home to the Barbuda fallow deer and red-footed tortoise already have been cleared to build the airport. □

## Latvia extends an entry ban on Russian tourists until March 2025 citing Moscow’s war in Ukraine

HELSINKI (AP) — Latvia’s government has extended



A view of Riga, Latvia, Sept. 5, 2023.

Associated Press

restrictions on the entry of Russian citizens into the Baltic country until next year, citing Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine which officials say is “still posing a threat to the internal security of Latvia.”

The Cabinet of Prime Minister Evika Siliņa decided Tuesday to lengthen the entry conditions on Russian citizens until March 4, 2025. Russian citizens will continue to be banned from entering Latvia, a European Union country, for the pur-

poses of tourism and leisure, the government said in a statement.

However, some Russians will be permitted to enter, including those with residence permits valid in Latvia or another EU member state, or Russians whose entry is related to humanitarian considerations like political dissidents.

In September 2022, Poland and the Baltic states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania reached a joint agreement to restrict the numbers of

Russian citizens coming to their countries to prevent alleged security risks amid Russia’s war in nearby Ukraine.

NATO member Latvia, a country of 1.9 million people that borders Russia, is home to a sizable ethnic Russian minority that makes up about 25% of the country’s population. The Baltic Sea nation previously has been a popular vacation venue and its capital, Riga, a popular weekend destination for Russian tourists. □



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## Aruban legends: Frenchman's Pass

(Oranjestad)—If you ever plan on taking a group tour of the island, you may pass through the Frenchman's Pass in Balashi. The Frenchman's pass (known to locals as "Frans Pas") remains a mysterious—and spooky—road of which its legend is told from generation to generation.

The history of the Frenchman's pass—and how it got its name—dates back to the colonization era, when the French tried to colonize the island, but were met with an angry mob of indigenous settlers, refusing to give up their land. However, as the French were heavily equipped with fire arms, the indigenous settlers began to retreat, and hid away in nearby caves. The French colonizers tried to smoke them out of the caves, but the

indigenous settlers ended up inhaling too much smoke and most died in those caves. From then on, this passage was known as Frenchman's Pass, and there have been many accounts of spirits roaming the area of Spanish Lagoon. There are many ghost stories surrounding this area, but one of the most famous one involves a lonely hitchhiker, trying to find a ride back home in the dark rainy night.

Sometime after trying to hitchhike, the man saw a car approaching, appearing almost ghost-like in the rain. However, since he needed a ride real bad, he didn't think twice and jumped in. But to his horror, he noticed that there was no driver in the front. Paralyzed with fear, he didn't dare to get out, and the car started to move.

When approaching a sharp turn, the hitch hiker braced for impact, but just when he thought the car might drive straight off the road and crash, he saw a hand appear out the window and turn the wheel. For the next few turns, the hand appeared again. After having had enough, the man decided to jump out and he ran to Santa Cruz.

Arriving at a nearby bar, he ordered a drink and began to tell everyone about his experience. Everyone grew quiet, because they realized he wasn't some drunk messing around; he was telling the truth.

Sometime later, two men walked into the bar and one of them no-



ticed the hitchhiker. He called out to his buddy and said: "Look, there's the idiot who sat in our car when we were pushing it!"

French man's pass is one of the few sites on the island that keeps the locals on their toes. While most ghost stories may not have real grounds—or some may even be a set up story for a joke, this pass contributes a lot to our culture of folkloric story-telling.  
Source: [visitaruba.com](http://visitaruba.com)

## Visit the island's hidden natural pools

(Oranjestad)—Amongst the countless beaches surrounding the island that are well-known and frequently visited, there are an additional two "hidden" natural pools that are situated in the northern coast of the island, two ideal stops in your tour itinerary.

### Conchi (Natural Pool)

For many years, Conchi was the only natural pool that we had on the island. Located in the Arikok National Park, near Boca Keto and the Daimari Ranch, Conchi—also known "Cura

di Turtuga (Turtle's Cove) or just Natural Pool—is reachable with any 4x4 vehicle or by foot if you're up for a long hike. However, since it is part of the National Park, you must first get permission from park management to enter. You would have to purchase a day pass, and receive a wristband as proof of payment. Once you've completed that, you are set!

If you decide to hike from the entrance of the Arikok National Park, this is also possible: do bring plenty of protective clothing and

enough water and food—it could take you up to three hours to hike there!

However, when you eventually do get there, you will be greeted with crystal blue water surrounded by a natural rock formation that protects you from the wild waves on the other side. Though the pool is located on the northern side of the island (where the sea is largely rough and largely no suitable for swimming), the pool itself is very calm. It's also relatively deep, and you can climb up the

rocks and jump in!

### Cave Pool

This relatively new pool appeared just a few years ago, when a part of the dried up coral floor broke off and created a partition between the ocean and what is now the natural pool that is hidden there. Because it's still so new, there is no official name for it, but most people just call it the cave pool.

Just like the Conchi, the new natural pool is situated on the northern coast of

Aruba. However, this pool is much easier to reach with any type of vehicle, and there is no hiking needed. This spot has also become a regular stop for touring visitors.

When you get there, maybe you won't be able to spot the pool immediately, because you will probably notice the moon-shaped lagoon where wild northern waves crash into each other. Sounds scary, but if you look down on your right, you'll see a calm, crystal blue little pool in the corner. To get there, you have to climb down some stairs. Be careful when climbing down and follow the instructions of your tour guide if you have one.

And just like Conchi, this pool also has a jumping spot, and a rope to climb back up the boulder.

Picture of cave pool is credited to [RockaBeach Tours](http://RockaBeachTours.com)



# LOCAL



## Po-kè Ono - A Taste of Asia with a Twist: Exploring Flavorful Fusion



Amidst the vibrant paradise of Aruba, where turquoise waters meet golden sands, a culinary gem awaits: Po-kè Ono, the coolest Asian fusion spot that will whisk you away on an exotic flavor adventure. Experience an explosion of Asian tastes like never before led by the creative genius of Chef Urvin Croes, the mastermind behind Aruba's acclaimed Infini restaurant. Po-kè Ono serves up an enticing menu that blends

traditional Asian flavors with modern twists, all within a cheery ambiance that exudes warmth and tropical charm.

At Po-kè Ono, diners can savor an array of flavors from the new menu items that stand out for their artful presentation and delectable taste. One of the highlights is the traditional Vietnamese Pho, a soul-soothing soup consisting of bone broth, rice noodles, succu-

lent thinly sliced meat, fresh herbs, and zesty spices, making it an explosion of taste in every spoonful.

Another must-try dish is The Elvis Presley Bao, a playful homage to the King of Rock 'n' Roll. This fun creation features fried spam with sweet teriyaki, peanut sauce, crispy fried plantains, crisp lettuce, red onions, and a spicy kick from the Kewpie mayo. The combination of sweet, savory, and spicy flavors is a harmony that leaves guests coming back for more.

If you're craving a delicious fusion of Indonesian and Hawaiian influences, the Babi Sate Poke hits all the right notes. Indonesian-style pork skewers are served with rich peanut sauce, crunchy crispy onions, pickled cucumber, and creamy avocado, resulting in a medley of textures and flavors that captivate the palate.

Beyond the flavors, Po-kè Ono impresses with its thoughtfully curated ambiance that reflects the Asian fusion theme. With two locations in Renaissance Marketplace and the lobby of Azure Residence, the restaurant exudes a tropical and laid-back vibe, inviting guests to unwind and indulge in a delightful dining experience. The use of fun cocktail glasses and relaxed decor further enhances the sense of pleasure, making every visit a memorable one.

Get ready for double the fun at Po-kè Ono with their awesome two-for-one happy hour. From 4 pm to 6 pm, this fantastic deal lets you dive into selected items at an incredible value. It's the perfect opportunity to try out their fresh new menu while sipping on delightful beverages.

Meet the culinary maestro, Chef Urvin Croes, the creative force behind Po-kè Ono and Infini. With an unyielding passion for Asian cuisine, rooted in his Chinese heritage, he sprinkles his magic on every plate at Po-kè Ono, crafting innovative and artfully delicious dishes. Having honed his skills in top-notch hotel restaurants and even snatching the title of 'Iron Chef Aruba's first winner,' Chef Urvin's culinary expertise shines through in every mouthwatering bite.

Promoting Aruba as a culinary destination, Chef Urvin sources ingredients locally whenever possible, supporting farmers who share his passion for quality produce. The result is a menu that expertly balances traditional recipes with modern techniques, elevating every dish to new heights. His love for food and the cultural stories behind each creation are evident

in the passionate manner in which he prepares and presents his dishes.

Notably, Po-kè Ono has earned its well-deserved reputation as the number one restaurant on Tripadvisor Palm Beach, a testament to its success and popularity among locals and tourists alike.

Po-kè Ono is like a treasure trove of Asian fusion delights, all crafted with love and expertise by the one and only Chef Urvin Croes. You'll be treated to an array of dishes, from Pho to inventive Bao creations, each artfully presented. The relaxed ambiance and awesome two-for-one happy hour make dining here an absolute pleasure. Once you've tasted the magic of Po-kè Ono, you'll be coming back for more! So, what are you waiting for? Dive in and indulge in this captivating world of Asian-inspired goodness!

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by Urvin Croes  
Poke • Sushi • Bao's

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View menu

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**Aruba Tourism Authority honored loyal visitors at Costa Linda Beach Resorts!**

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Goodwill Ambassadors of Aruba. These honorees were respectively honored with a certificate acknowledging their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honor certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three honoring levels are as follows:

<b>Distinguished</b>	<b>Visitor</b>
<b>(10&gt;years consecutively visiting Aruba)</b>	
<b>Goodwill</b>	<b>Ambassador</b>
<b>(20&gt;years consecutively visiting Aruba)</b>	
<b>Emerald</b>	<b>Ambassador</b>
<b>(35&gt;years consecutively</b>	

visiting Aruba)

The honorees were:

Goodwill Ambassadors Mr. David & Mrs. Martine Pul-lara

Ms. Jorgino Willems representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of the Costa Linda Beach Resort bestowed the certificate to the honorees, presented them with memorable gifts, and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their best-loved vacation destination, as their home away from home.

Top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by the honorees were:

Aruba's warm weather  
Aruba's friendly people  
Aruba's beautiful clean beaches  
Aruba's restaurants  
Aruba's water activities



On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we

would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees

for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island".

**Aruba to me**



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Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is ..... Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: [news@arubatoday.com](mailto:news@arubatoday.com) and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive?

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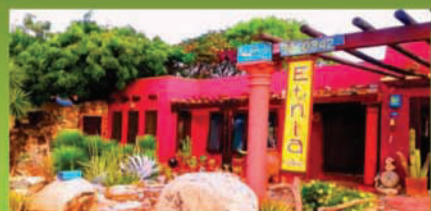
Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we

strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from our awesome visitor, Barry Rob, who's visiting us from Steubenville, Ohio, USA.

He wrote to us saying: "Aruba to me is like seeing an old friend!"

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers!



Article by Etnia Nativa  
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## Fishing as Aruban tradition

## Episode CCXLVI - 246

Each week, Island Insight shares an Aruban story with you through the eyes of Etnia Nativa, who welcomes island visitors with an experience way beyond tourist attractions. We link readers with the mystical aspects of the island, its native culture, and its traditional heritage. In this episode, we elaborate on the fishing tradition of the island.



One of the activities beyond hunting that man had developed over thousands of years for subsistence purposes was fishing. Lakes, rivers, and the vast oceans offered an abundance of life-sustaining resources. When man arrived on these islands of the southwestern Caribbean, sea food of all kinds swarmed the shores.

Aruba is the closest of the ABC islands to the mainland. It offers a 360-degree view over the sea from many of its hilltops. Strombus horn blowers were quick to sound the alarm in case of a fire. Early detection and a vital sense of awareness could mean a lot.

The so-called Continental Bank between Aruba and the opposite coast reaches a depth of about 650 feet. The sea here was always very rich in fish. So since ancestral times, fish and a variety of sea creatures, including manatees, seals, sea turtles, squid, snails, oysters, crustaceans, sea bird eggs, and many types of algae, have formed a means of subsistence for the native inhabitants of Aruba, who relied heavily on the fruits provided by the sea.

The Arubans, like many other Windward Islanders, dedicated themselves from the end of the colonial era until the middle of the last century, mainly to coastal fishing. They were equipped with rowing boats, canoes, or small sailing boats. These were later provided with combustion engines. Boats were equipped with fresh water, pedals, harpoons, fishing gear, bait, long ropes, and as few anchors as possible. Fishermen also carried out their trade around the Monjes Islands to pick "bubi" eggs or to an area called Bajo, or shallow, off the opposite coast. Fishermen also used various types of nets and traps, like the "tarai" throwing reda, which is a bigger net that needs a team of people to handle, and the canasta, a trap that someone drops with some bait in it in shallow waters to be picked up in a few days.



Deep-bottom or seabed fishing was to catch red snapper and a variety of groupers like "jeanpao" or "wowo di boyo". Fishermen did not generate much income in those days; however, fish was a great source of satisfying nutrition. The food par excellence of Aruba is fish accompanied by fried sweet plantain, cassava, beans, corn, and squashes.

Sometimes real giants were captured, "barracudas" that marked 20 pounds on the scale and measured between 3 and 7 feet long. While kingfish range in weight from 22 to 44 pounds, the grouper can tip the scales at 155, including "brazil," "pamper," "haldo," and many more. Coastal fishermen to this day supply fresh fish to locals and restaurants. However, catches of the larger cutters brought to Aruba's markets are part of a less fresh import supply as they remained in cold storage for some time. According to a rough

estimate, there were about a hundred small professional fishing boats in the mid-1950s.

In Aruba and Curaçao, there were no facilities to preserve large quantities of fish for a few days. Until 1911, the first cold storage warehouse was built in Aruba, although with restricted capacity, it did its best.

The benefits of preserving the native culture are enormous, critical to keeping the island's history alive, and essential to keeping our ancestral identity alive. We encourage you to check out the weekly educational online episodes through Island-Insight, written by Etnia Nativa, the more complete cultural blog, which will definitely show you Aruba from a different perspective.



If you are interested in connecting and really know all about your travel destination—our flora, fauna, geology, history, autochthonous art, as well as the true identity of the island—you should book a visit to Etnia Nativa, a unique native gem! Let Anthony, our acclaimed cultural columnist, guide and lecture you regarding the most interesting and revealing stories about Aruba's undiscovered native ethnicity, an adventure beyond beaches and tourist traps. Visit his magnificent dwelling that integrates reused materials with nature, bursting with culture and island heritage! WhatsApp +297 592 2702 etnianativa03@gmail.com

# Aruba's cultural and literary development: Then and now

**(Oranjestad)—The Aruban culture has seen many substantial developments over the course of a century. With the introduction of the Lago Refinery at the turn of the 20th century, followed by the breakout of the Second World War and the general incentive for political independence during the mid-century, a cultural identity on the island began to take form and have since developed through international and local influences.**

In the pre-industrial era of the 19th century, much could not be said about a cultural identity on the island. Still being a part of a Dutch colonial territory at the time, as well as not having political or economic autonomy (Curacao was the center of commerce, cultural life, and political management of the Netherland Antilles at the time), the small population of Aruba consisted mostly of farmers and fishermen, tending to their crops and their cattle, or going out to fish to provide for their family. As Quito Nicolaas states in his article *Historia di Literatura Arubiano: E Bida Cultural (Literary History of Aruba: Cultural Life)*, "during the pre-industrial period, there were no significant economic activity that could have created a cultural ambience, with only one way to generate profit at the time for the sub existence of Aruban families."

It wasn't until the intro-

duction of the Lago Refinery in San Nicolas in 1928, that the island saw a small boom in cultural manifestations and entertainment, as farmers left the 'cunucu' (country) life to work in the refinery, which resulted in Aruba acquiring a different economic pillar. Before this, entertainment and cultural manifestations were mostly experienced by local parishes and the island's elite, who often partook in cultural and entertaining activities around the island, like going to the movie theater or coming together to share poetry on Sundays after church.

### Literary life

Throughout the 19th century and up until the 1940s, there were also not much trace of a cultural climate for the cultural-literary sector on the island. Primary education was introduced on the island in the mid-19th century, followed by secondary and higher education around the late 30's and 40's. It wasn't until the 1950s, with the introduction of the E.R.N.A agreement in 1951 and the signing of the Statute in 1954, which allowed more space for and control over the economic and cultural development of Aruba, that the literary life on the island began to grow substantially compared to decades before. This was in response to local institutions established in the 1940s for cultural and literary growth on the island, but that did not yet capture the attention of the general public.



The 1950 brought with it a boom of literary production on the island, like those of V.S. Piternella, as well as migrant authors José Ramón Vicioso y Rings William Rufus, who have also contributed to the literary development on the island. The literary movement was further promoted by local broadcasters Voz di Aruba and Radio Kelkboom, with their regular broadcast of literary works.

The 50s and 60s also saw the influence of international cultures, especially that of the United States. During this time, because of international influences as well as the continued prosperity of the oil refinery, cultural traditions in Aruba began to really take form and become widespread, as different worldly and local concepts were intro-

duced in the Aruban society. With the establishment of local television broadcast station Tele-Aruba in 1963, and with time and possibilities, local programs such as "Nos Tera" ("Our Land") started to pay more attention to the Aruban culture and worked to form a cultural consciousness within the community. The 1960s also saw the rise of local authors and artists, who were more comfortable in producing works in our native tongue, Papiamentu, but who also produced works in Spanish, English and Dutch. This new phenomenon was in response to the interaction between economic growth, individual prosperity, cultural life and literary expression.

### The 21st century

Nowadays, international influence on our culture is still

prevalent, especially those from Latin America, the United States and The Netherlands. Nevertheless, there also exists a strong cultural identity and traditions that are exclusive to the Aruban culture, often manifesting during traditional celebrations, like Dia di San Juan/ Dera Gai (St. John's Day), Dia di Himno y Bandera (National Hymn and Flag Day), Camping during Easter and much more. With the surge of social media in the last decade, artistic voices, especially those of the younger generation, has become even more prevalent and easily accessible to the community of Aruba through online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. Source: *Historia di Literatura Arubiano: E Bida Cultural* by J.R. "Quito" Nicolaas

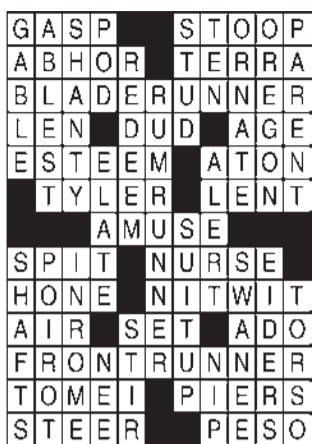


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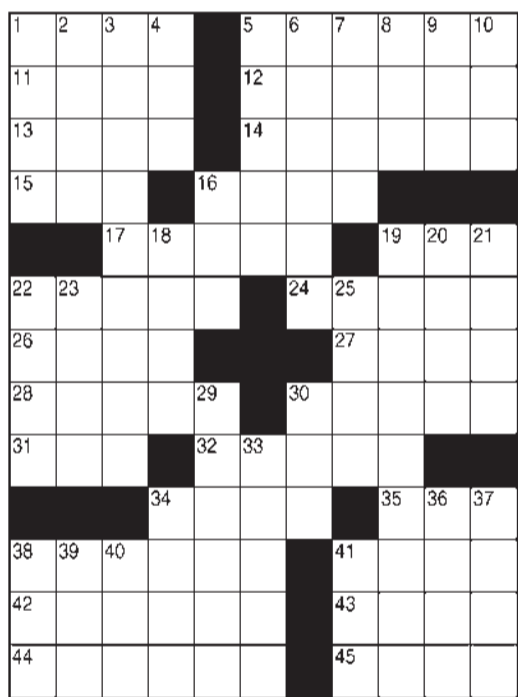
**CROSSWORD**

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 44 FBI employees before Bravo
  - 5 Back teeth
  - 11 Con man's trick
  - 12 Mideast peninsula
  - 13 Basilica part
  - 14 Garden pavilion
  - 15 Track act
  - 16 Ballet leap
  - 17 Full moon, for one
  - 19 Tyler of "Armageddon"
  - 22 Chinese or Thai
  - 24 Black card
  - 26 Brooklyn team
  - 27 Cruise stop
  - 28 Marina sight
  - 30 Mink's cousin
  - 31 Bat material
  - 32 Team
  - 34 Close
  - 35 Tick off
  - 38 Thorny shrub
  - 41 Leave speechless
  - 42 "Apollo 13" director
  - 43 Teen woe
- DOWN**
- 1 Obsessed captain
  - 2 Easy gait
  - 3 Softball variety
  - 4 Woodsman's tool
  - 5 Wizards
  - 6 Gives an address
  - 7 Take it easy
  - 8 Penny prez
  - 9 Chest protector
  - 10 — Paulo
  - 16 Painter Vermeer
  - 18 Diner dish
  - 19 Desperate
  - 20 Goofing off
  - 21 Turn suddenly
  - 22 Writer Seton
  - 23 Sailor's septet
  - 25 Falafel holder
  - 29 Summer top
  - 30 Unconscious
  - 33 Thigh muscles
  - 34 Check a UPC
  - 36 Celtic letter
  - 37 Pants part
  - 38 "So that's it!"
  - 39 Machinery part
  - 40 Really impress
  - 41 Spotted



Yesterday's answer



2-28

A XYDLBAA XR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-28

**CRYPTOQUOTE**

CYBD SHODK MYAE KYAC

IEHLC YAJ XEYS RJK VRZRUF

GCHID. — NYEH UDHCD

VAEKJYU

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THEY WHO GIVE HAVE ALL THINGS; THEY WHO WITHHOLD HAVE NOTHING. — INDIAN SAYING

# Small business owners are optimistic for growth in 2024

By MAE ANDERSON  
AP Business Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — While it seems increasingly unlikely the U.S. economy is headed for recession, small businesses still face headwinds like higher costs and difficulty retaining qualified workers. But owners say they're optimistic as 2024 gets underway, according to a new survey from American Express. Eighty-five percent of all small businesses surveyed said they were satisfied with the success of their business, and 86% said they achieved their 2023 business goals. In August 2023, by contrast, 80% of all small businesses surveyed said their long-term financial confidence was being negatively impacted by the economy. □

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## FX reaches back over 400 years for its next ambitious series, adapting the hit novel 'Shogun'



This image released by FX shows Eita Okuno as Saeki Nobutatsu, from left, Anna Sawai as Toda Mariko, Hiromoto Ida as Kiyama Ukon Sadanaga in a scene from "Shogun."

Associated Press

**By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer**

**NEW YORK (AP)** — When FX sent screenwriter Justin Marks a copy of James Clavell's hit 1975 novel "Shogun" with the idea of turning it into a series, he initially couldn't put it down. That's because he was reluctant to pick it up.

The book about a British navigator shipwrecked in feudal Japan was massive — over 1,000 pages. And old: "It was the book that was on our parents' nightstand." Plus it sounded culturally out of step. He assumed it couldn't be adapted for 2024.

Marks laughs that he "was being a jerk" and judging a book by its cover. With urging from his wife, novelist Rachel Kondo, he eventually picked it up and soon realized why Clavell's novel was so celebrated.

"When you open it and you go through it, it is a remarkably modern story," he said. "It really does get to the core of what it is to encounter another culture and to encounter oneself

in that culture."

Marks and his wife plunged into the fish-out-of-water tale and now are ready for the world to see their 10-episode fictional limited series "Shōgun." Set in Japan in 1600, it's rooted in the real history of the period, a dangerous time when several warlords jockeyed for ultimate power as European powers warily circled the island nation.

The arrival of a shipwrecked Englishman — John Blackthorne — disrupts the balance in Japan and yet offers intriguing possibilities since he knows important global information. A pawn at first, he rises to become a trusted adviser and ally.

"It really came down to being the story about agency and this story about characters who are trying to exert control over the path of their own destiny in a very chaotic world where you can literally lose your head at any moment," said Marks.

The series has elements of intrigue and spectacle like "Game of Thrones," with

brutal beheadings, people boiled alive or sliced open with katanas, blood splashing on window screens and fire-tipped arrows.

It also shows the hesitant understanding growing between Blackthorne (Cosmo Jarvis) and Lord Toranaga (Hiroyuki Sanada) and a love story between Blackthorne and translator Lady Mariko (Anna Sawai).

"Maybe fate brought you here for a reason," Blackthorne is told shortly after shipwrecking in Japan. "Maybe you'll live long enough to find out what it is."

Sanada says the cast and creators came at the project hoping to respect the novel but also to ground it in historical reality and make the characters believable. "Our North Star was authenticity from the beginning," he said.

The series is riding a wave of new TV offerings that embrace Asian culture, including Max's "Ninja Kamui," "Warrior" and "Tokyo Vice," Paramount+'s "The Tiger's Apprentice," and

"Avatar: The Last Airbender" and "House of Ninjas," both on Netflix.

The 1975 book "Shogun" sold millions and a 1980 TV miniseries, starring Richard Chamberlain and Toshiro Mifune, was watched by 1 in 3 U.S. households, winning three Emmys and three Golden Globes. Both the series and book triggered a wave of interest in feudal Japan, from kids playing with toy katanas to Tom Cruise starring in "The Last Samurai."

"It's almost impossible not to continue to read 'Shogun' once having opened it," The New York Times said in its review. "Yet it's not only something that you read — you live it. The imagination is possessed." The new series — with Clavell's daughter Michaela as a producer — adjusts the story. Sanada said that if the book was "blue eyes watching Japan," the FX series puts on "Japanese lenses." Blackthorne is less the hero here than a catalyst, as co-cre-

ators Marks and Kondo explore power dynamics.

Those tuning in may feel a whiff of "The Godfather," another epic in the 1970s with a strong sense of loyalty, family and honor, while violence lurks nearby. There's also a note of "Succession," which Marks doesn't deny.

"There's always in a writers' room a show we're all watching when we're doing it and 'Succession' was that show," he says with a laugh. "We really were sort of just loving it. And in some ways it probably bled into the mix."

Perhaps the most enjoyable parts of the series is the moments when both East and West realize they can learn from the other.

At first, Blackthorne calls the Japanese "barbarians," and they, in turn, use the same term to describe him. But his bravery and expertise with weapons makes him valuable, and he learns about karma and inner calm.

"Do not be fooled by our politeness, our bows, our maze of rituals," Lady Mariko tells him. "Beneath it all, we could be a great distance away, safe and alone."

Sanada said it was appropriate that Western and Japanese crew members worked together to create the show. "The making of 'Shogun' itself has great drama and overlaps the story," he says. "This is another good message for now: If we get together, we can create a better future together."

Marks, who also served as showrunner and executive producer, says the "Shogun" team tried hard to fix mistakes in the novel, but such errors are always going to happen when bridges are built between cultures.

"We're never going to get to place where we don't make mistakes. What we do reach, hopefully, is every 40 years, whatever it may be, we reach a point where we just make better mistakes." □



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## The wild, wild Western Conference: Tight race to the finish awaits with slim separation among teams

By **PAT GRAHAM**  
AP Sports Writer

**DENVER (AP)** — It's almost hard to picture a postseason without both LeBron James and Stephen Curry. And yet it very well could happen. They're both on the bubble.

That's just the strength of the Western Conference this season.

As it currently stands, James and his ninth-place Los Angeles Lakers would host Curry and the 10th-place Golden State Warriors in the play-in tournament, with the loser being eliminated and the winner still needing to win another to actually make the postseason field. From top to nearly bottom, the West has been a grind this season. Consider this: Kawhi Leonard and the Los Angeles Clippers reside in fourth and 2 1/2-games out of the No. 1 seed. They're also a four-game slide away from falling into play-in territory.

Uncertainty reigns in a con-



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry, right, moves the ball while defended by Denver Nuggets forward Aaron Gordon during the second half of an NBA basketball game Sunday, Feb. 25, 2024, in San Francisco.

Associated Press

ference where the Minnesota Timberwolves and youthful Oklahoma City Thunder sit atop the stand-

ings with matching 40-17 marks.

The next several weeks are going to be a mad dash for

seeding and playoff survival.

"The depth of the West and the amount of teams

that are legit threats is as deep as it's ever been," said Phoenix coach Frank Vogel, whose team has an identical record (34-24) as New Orleans, both a half-game away from the play-in line. A quick refresher course on the format for the play-in tournament that takes place April 16-19: The seventh and eighth seeds will play in each conference and the winning team will earn the seventh seed into the NBA playoffs. The eighth seed still has a safety net and will face the winner of the ninth and 10th seeds to see who gets in.

Last season, Miami lost its first game in the play-in bracket, then beat Chicago to advance. The Heat made it all the way to the NBA Finals before losing to Denver in five games.

The Lakers, too, were in the play-in tournament, winning their matchup, before going on a run all the way to the Western Conference finals. □

## Reigning WNBA MVP Breanna Stewart re-signs with New York Liberty



New York Liberty's Breanna Stewart (30) shoots over Las Vegas Aces' Kelsey Plum (7) during the second half in Game 3 of a WNBA basketball final playoff series Oct. 15, 2023, in New York. Associated Press

By **DOUG FEINBERG**  
AP Basketball Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Reigning WNBA MVP Breanna Stewart re-signed with the New York Liberty, the team announced Monday.

The Liberty now have their entire starting lineup back from last season's team that lost in the WNBA Finals to the Las Vegas Aces.

"It's a monumental day in New York as we are thrilled to welcome back the MVP, Breanna Stewart," general manager Jonathan Kolb said.

"Stewie's return marks our unwavering commitment

to excellence and our collective drive to bring a championship to New York."

Stewart came to the Liberty last season after spending her entire career with the Seattle Storm. She averaged 23 points, 9.3 rebounds and 3.8 assists and earned the league MVP honor for the second time in her career. The MVP award was one of the tightest races with Connecticut's Alyssa Thomas and Las Vegas' A'ja Wilson right behind Stewart.

The 29-year-old forward previously won the league's

MVP in 2018 and helped Seattle win two WNBA championships in 2018 and 2020. She was MVP of the Finals both times.

The Liberty made the Finals for the first time since 2002 before losing in four games to Las Vegas.

It was no surprise that New York re-signed Stewart after they had put the franchise tag on her.

"I'm excited for what we're doing here in New York and with the Liberty. ... I'm looking forward to it for many years to come," Stewart said in exit interviews after New York's Finals loss. □

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## The U.S. women fought to raise the level of soccer worldwide, and now the competition is much tougher

By ANNE M. PETERSON  
AP Sports Writer

**CARSON, Calif. (AP)** — The U.S. national team has fought for years to raise the level of women's soccer across the globe, but that doesn't make its inevitable losses to teams it once dominated any easier. "People say that everyone's catching up with us. Of course, and that's what needs to happen in women's football," forward Alex Morgan said after the U.S. fell 2-0 to Mexico on Monday night at the CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup. "But yes, do we want to stay on top? Absolutely. But we have to continue to have an edge and today we didn't have that."

The loss was only the second time Mexico has beaten the U.S. The only other Mexico victory in the 43-game series was in 2010, a 2-1 win at a World Cup



United States forward Sophia Smith (11) and Mexico defender Cristina Ferral (15) watch as Mexico defender Greta Espinoza (14) clears the ball during a CONCACAF Gold Cup women's soccer tournament match, Monday, Feb. 26, 2024, in Carson, Calif.

Associated Press

qualifying match in Cancun.

Coming as it did after some difficult times for the U.S.

team, Monday's loss was inevitably going to raise

questions.

"Ten, 15 years ago, was way different with the score lines than it is today.

I think fans are seeing that all of the teams are continuing to improve and evolve and can compete at the highest level. If not tactically, it's technically or it's mentally or it's physically," Morgan said. "Teams are executing their game plan against top teams in the world and they're simultaneously becoming better."

The United States won back-to-back Women's World Cups in 2015 and 2019. But as the women's game drew more attention, other federations invested in their teams, and professional leagues grew internationally. The U.S. women set an example by campaigning for equal pay to their male counterparts. □

## Shohei Ohtani is batting second between Mookie Betts and Freddie Freeman in his Dodgers debut

By DAVID BRANDT  
AP Baseball Writer

**GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP)** —

Shohei Ohtani's home in the Los Angeles Dodgers batting order will be the No.

2 spot — at least for now. "Just seeing Shohei in the lineup makes us a lot better," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said Tuesday. "There's been a lot of anticipation, so we're excited." The two-way Japanese star is expected to get two or three plate appearances Tuesday when he makes his exhibition debut with Dodgers against the Chicago White Sox. He's in the second spot of the lineup, sandwiched between Mookie Betts, who is the leadoff hitter, and Freddie Freeman.

Roberts said all three stars were receptive to the Betts-Ohtani-Freeman lineup construction. The manager

added that having Ohtani at the No. 2 spot wasn't "set in stone," but it's something he wants to try for a while during spring training. "I feel that having Shohei hitting in front of Freddie gives Shohei a lot of protection," Roberts said. The will be Ohtani's first game action since signing a record \$700 million, 10-year contract during the offseason — and since right elbow surgery in September that will keep the two-time MVP from pitching this year. He'll be the designated hitter, a role he's expected to fill all season. Ohtani has looked sharp in practice this spring and

took live batting practice on Sunday. Roberts has said Ohtani will dictate how many at-bats he gets Tuesday, but he expected him to come up two or three times.

The 29-year-old Ohtani is further along in his recovery than Los Angeles anticipated, and the team hopes he will be available when the Dodgers and the San Diego Padres play a two-game series in Seoul, South Korea, on March 20 and 21 to start the regular season. "Most importantly is his health," Roberts told reporters this week. "So if it lines up, great. And if it doesn't, then we'll still move on from there." □



Los Angeles Dodgers designated hitter Shohei Ohtani participates in spring training baseball workouts at Camelback Ranch in Los Angeles, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2024.

Associated Press